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General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

23rd plenary meeting
Tuesday, 19 September 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 122 *(continued)*

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/55/345/Add.5)

The President: I should like to inform Members that since the issuance of document A/55/345 and Addenda 1-4, Sierra Leone has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter. May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The President: This will be reflected in document A/55/345/Add.5, to be issued.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International cooperation of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Mr. Sama Banya.

Mr. Banya (Sierra Leone): May I, on behalf of my delegation and the Government and people of the Republic of Sierra Leone, add my vice to those before me to offer warm felicitations on your election as President of this epoch-making fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the Millennium Assembly. Your long and distinguished career in the service of your country and on the international scene makes you eminently suitable for election. My delegation is confident that under your able guidance, our deliberations will be smooth and productive. Indeed, we have seen evidence of that in your insistence on punctuality. I want to assure you, Sir, of my delegation's fullest cooperation.

To our brother and colleague Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia, I convey my delegation's gratitude and appreciation for the able manner in which he conducted the affairs of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

I should like to thank Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and his colleagues and staff, whose dedication to duty deserves the highest commendation. I extend our special gratitude to Mr. Annan for his insight into the problems in my country and the objective manner in which he has reported his findings to the Security Council. The United Nations Security Council has deployed over 13,000 peacekeeping troops in Sierra Leone, the largest number in any country at any one time. In collaboration with my Government, it is setting up a special court to try all those who are guilty of the most horrendous and atrocious crimes against humanity. In furtherance of its interest in bringing stability to the country, it has planned to send a high-level delegation to Sierra Leone to assess the situation on the ground.

I should also like to extend a warm congratulations to Tuvalu on its admission as the 189th Member of this Organization.

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00-64845 (E)

Following the unwarranted criminal abduction by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of hundreds of United Nations peacekeeping troops of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), a peaceful demonstration by the members of civil society of Sierra Leone was organized to appeal to Foday Sankoh, the leader of the RUF, for the unconditional release of the hostages and to prevail upon him to cooperate in order successfully to implement the Lomé Peace Agreement, especially the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Programme.

As soon as the demonstrators reached his residence, Mr. Sankoh's men opened fire on the unarmed and defenceless crowd, gunning down 20 and seriously wounding several others, two of whom later died in hospital. Subsequent events have revealed that the RUF had planned a bloody overthrow of the elected Government on the following day, 9 May 2000. This at first put the whole Lomé Peace Agreement in doubt, especially Mr. Sankoh's role as leader of the RUF.

Under the Lomé Peace Agreement, Mr. Sankoh was appointed Chairman of the Strategic Mineral Resources Commission, with the status of a vice-president; he used this position to open secret negotiations with a number of people for the exploitation and sale of Sierra Leone's diamonds, without reference to any other person.

The Government of Sierra Leone had signed the Lomé Peace Agreement in the belief that it would put an end to the atrocities being inflicted on defenceless civilians, especially women and children. Among other things, it provided for the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants into society. It provided for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced people. It also provided for the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers (UNAMSIL) in the country. The RUF leaders have forfeited their right to benefit from the provisions of Lomé; however, because of its other provisions, my Government will revive the Agreement, particularly the DDR Programme.

My Government has already expressed condolences to the Governments of those who lost their lives during the hostage-taking. UNAMSIL is to be congratulated for the professional manner in which it freed the hostages. Another group of bandits, the so-called "West Side Boys", had seized and held captive 1 Sierra Leone soldier and 10 British servicemen who were in Sierra Leone to train a professional army whic would be responsible to the democratically electe Government of the country. That group refused release the hostages, despite the long and patie negotiations, and was even beginning to threaten the lives.

Mercifully, to everyone's relief, the hostages ha now been rescued. Unfortunately, one member of t British rescue team lost his life, while another w seriously wounded. My Government has alread congratulated the British Government for t professionalism of the rescue team. At the same tim we have expressed heartfelt condolences for the loss the life of a member of the team.

Another recent and very welcome resolution the Security Council is the ban on the sale of illeg diamonds from Sierra Leone, the so-called "Blo Diamonds". As is well known, the proceeds from th trade have been used to fuel the rebel war machine would like to thank the Government of the Unit Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada f their perseverance in opposing this horrible activi calling things by their proper names and pointi fingers in the right direction. My country is confid that the new arrangements for the marketing of diamonds will not only end the illegal trade but w also bring sanity into the system, to the benefit of country.

Thanks to the decisive actions of the Secur Council and the Economic Community of West Afric States under the indefatigable leadership of Preside Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Konare of Ma Sierra Leoneans now see a real light at the end of wh has been a long and tortuous tunnel. The forthcomi trials of those who have committed such horrend and inhuman crimes against their fellow countrym will be a signal to would-be adventurers that such a will no longer go unpunished.

No words can sufficiently express the thanks a gratitude of the people of Sierra Leone to the Secur Council, the international community as a whole troop-contributing countries. Following the occupat and destruction of economic areas, the carting away our resources, the displacement of hundreds thousands of our people and the wanton destruction life and property, I would like to appeal to all friends to continue and intensify their humanitar

assistance and to support programmes for rebuilding our country.

We have just entered a new millennium, bringing with us many unresolved problems — problems which have been discussed in this and other international forums over the years and which appear to lack any solution. We have only one world, and my delegation believes that it is worth our love. We should therefore demonstrate that love by adequately addressing outstanding issues like general disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, peaceful settlement of disputes, prohibition and control of small arms, prohibition of landmines, poverty alleviation, affordable drugs and treatment of debilitating and killer diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, advancing the Middle East peace process in accordance with various Security Council resolutions, equitable trade negotiations and, of course, reform of the Security Council.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Surin Pitsuwan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand.

Mr. Pitsuwan (Thailand): On behalf of the people and the Government of Thailand, I would like to extend my warm congratulations to you, Sir, upon your election to the presidency of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. I am confident that under your able guidance, we shall be able to build upon the momentum generated by the Millennium Summit and enjoy a successful and result-oriented General Assembly session.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Foreign Minister of Namibia, the President of the fifty-fourth session, for his leadership and tireless efforts throughout the past year. His wisdom and dedication to the tasks of our Assembly enabled him to serve as an effective bridge between the last session and the Millennium Summit, thus laying a firm foundation for our work this year.

On this occasion, may I, on behalf of the people and the Government of Thailand, extend a warm welcome to Tuvalu on its admission as the newest Member of the United Nations family.

The dawn of the new millennium is a time for both justified celebration of and sombre reflection on the achievements and shortcomings of the United Nations during the past 55 years. As we review the United Nations track record, I cannot but recall the very first words written in the United Nations Charter: "We the peoples of the United Nations". These few simple words convey an idea of overwhelming significance — that it is the peoples of our respective nations who represent the core *'raison d'être* of this foremost assembly of humankind. It is the peoples who should be the primary beneficiaries of every resolution that we adopt and every programme that we launch.

As we proceed with the first General Assembly session of this millennium, we should ask ourselves the questions, "Have we indeed put the peoples at the centre of all our deliberations and activities? Have we done enough to ensure that ordinary people, both men and women, young and old, benefit from all our initiatives and actions, collective as well as individual?"

We are encouraged that the Secretary-General, in his report to the Millennium Assembly, has highlighted the "peoples' concerns" as one of the primary agenda items for the international community to take up. And we are gratified that many countries have highlighted issues of direct interest to peoples at the Millennium Summit, from reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases to combating the scourge of drugs, from rolling back poverty to closing the educational gaps within and between countries. These are all important steps in the right direction.

But we need to do more. We need to adopt a fresh mindset that places the interests and welfare of the peoples — the peoples of our own countries and those of other nations — at the centre of our policies in socio-economic development and in maintaining international peace and security. We need to keep in mind that promoting the interests and welfare of peoples requires that we also promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. We need to work collectively to translate commitments made at the Millennium Summit and in other forums into concrete results that reach people directly.

Although the recent economic and financial crisis has brought devastating consequences to millions of people across the Asia-Pacific region, it has helped refocus the attention of Governments on the need to protect the most important of any economy's assets, namely, its people. The crisis, by exposing the inadequacies of national social safety nets in protecting the welfare of vulnerable peoples, has raised many difficult questions. In essence, how can one pursue

sustainable development and even attempt to attain economic prosperity when the basic needs of people cannot be fulfilled and the potentials of people not fully developed?

The idea of putting people at the centre of development efforts is not new. But its application has been far from widespread. As various countries slowly recover from the economic and financial crisis in Asia, the value of pursuing people-centred development has become ever greater. This development paradigm considers development as a means to promote people's welfare and interests rather than as an end in itself. It looks beyond quantitative indicators of growth and focuses more on how to nurture the capabilities of people in society so that they are empowered and are able to make positive contributions to a country's development efforts. And it needs to be forward-looking, taking into account the interests and welfare of future, unborn generations.

As part and parcel of the efforts to pursue people-centre development, we must put a premium on tackling those issues, national and transnational, that have a direct impact on people's welfare. I should therefore like to highlight three issues in particular that affect the very essence of the welfare of our peoples: drugs and narcotics-trafficking, HIV/AIDS and poverty alleviation through sustainable development.

One of the most unfortunate consequences of globalization is the globalization of the drugs and narcotics problem. Illicit trafficking in and production of narcotics erode an economy's resources, generate a host of social problems and undermine our human potential. These effects are widespread, from the most rural and remote of villages to the most modern of metropolises. It is a global social problem that affects people directly, both users and non-users. While all types of drugs and narcotics are a threat to society, we hope that the international community will give as much attention to the growing threat of methamphethamines as it did to heroin and other drugs in the past. The small size and low cost of producing methamphethamines make them readily accessible to all sectors of society and therefore difficult to suppress.

Thailand has spared no effort in tackling the drug and narcotics problem at the national level, and is at the forefront of regional and international cooperation to meet this challenge, with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). I am pleased to announce that Thailand and UNDCP will be hosting an International Congress, "In pursuit of a drug free ASEAN 2015: Sharing the vision, leading the change", in Bangkok from 11 to 13 October this year. We hope to establish an effective coordinating mechanism to tackle the drugs and narcotics problem along all fronts and at all levels, and we hope that the international community will support us in these endeavours.

We are gratified that the global problem of HIV/AIDS, which is affecting an increasing number of people in our societies, was given due attention at the Millennium Summit. But international efforts will have to be strengthened and sustained if the international community is to make a dent in a problem that has already affected more than 36 million people worldwide and is reaching epidemic proportions. We are honoured that Thailand has been cited as one of the success stories in tackling the HIV/AIDS problem in the developing world. Nevertheless, the sustainability of successful national efforts requires strong support and cooperation at the regional and multilateral levels and effective partnerships with non-governmental organizations, including the private sector.

In this connection, we hope that regional and international cooperation in preventing and alleviating the HIV/AIDS problem will emphasize the exchange of AIDS-related technologies and state-of-the-art techniques for the prevention and alleviation of this disease, as well as the sharing of knowledge on affordable HIV/AIDS-related drugs. We call on the Secretary-General to enhance his efforts in coordinating international action against HIV/AIDS. We also support the proposal for a special session of the General Assembly in 2001 to address this problem.

Uplifting peoples from abject poverty and endowing them with appropriate means to lead productive lives are the best guarantees of long-term social stability, and provide a secure foundation for future prosperity and international peace. Poverty reduction is thus at the core of people-centred development and the first step in promoting a more just and equitable global order. The tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD X), which Thailand had the honour of hosting from 12 to 19 February this year, drew particular attention to the risks of marginalization of the poorest countries in the global economy and of the

most vulnerable groups within both developing and developed countries.

UNCTAD is endeavouring to build a new consensus on how to have greater equity and participation by all in the international economy in this era of globalization. In line with the "Spirit of Bangkok" emerging from UNCTAD X, Thailand, as current President of UNCTAD, greatly appreciates the initiative by Japan during the Group of Eight (G-8) Summit in Okinawa and the G-8 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Miyazaki in July this year to invite representatives from developing countries as well as regional and international organizations to meet with the G-8 leaders as a means to strengthen North-South cooperation. We are also very appreciative of China's initiative to hold a Sino-African dialogue on development cooperation soon. We are convinced that these initiatives are a step in the right direction.

I was astounded to learn that fewer than 2 per cent of the world's population is connected to the Internet, despite all the hype, and that a large portion of mankind have never heard a dial tone. If such discrepancies in information (IT) and/or digital divides are not reversed soon, the developing world will be left far behind the rest of the world. Thailand believes that we should act in concert to maximize the benefits of IT and to ensure that the greatest possible percentage of the world's population is guaranteed IT access.

To this end, Thailand fully supports and appreciates the G-8 Okinawa Charter on the Global Information Society to bridge the so-called digital divide. We also welcome the contributions of the private sector, such as those of the Global Digital Divide Initiative of the World Economic Forum and the Global Business Dialogue on Electronic Commerce. We hope that more, similar initiatives will be forthcoming so that we, especially the developing part of the world, can overcome the digital divide.

Debt problems are also recognized as a serious obstacle to the pursuit of economic and social development, and all countries should be assisted in managing their debt obligations, including through a debt standstill. Thailand therefore also supports the convening of an international intergovernmental event on financing for development next year at the highest possible level and hopes that feasible and effective measures can be agreed upon to generate greater international financial assistance to support sustainable development and to address poverty. In this connection, we see great value in securing the active participation of the international financial and trade institutions and the private sector, as well as all the NGOs concerned.

The most effective way to ensure poverty reduction and promote sustainable development is to empower peoples with the capacity to help themselves. And there is no better way to achieve this than through education and training. Thailand thus attaches great importance to human resources development (HRD). Our efforts are not confined to the national level but extend to a wider, regional scale. We have been at the forefront in promoting HRD in the Mekong subregion, for we sincerely believe that the upgrading of human potential is the best way to fight poverty and ensure closer regional cooperation and sustainable development.

International peace and security begin at home. If we are able to pursue an all-encompassing notion of security that places the security of peoples at the apex of our considerations, if we can secure for people freedom from want as well as freedom from fear, then the likelihood of threats to international peace and security will be drastically reduced. Human security and people-centred development are two sides of the same coin: they each promote the welfare of peoples in different ways and reinforce one another at the same time.

It is gratifying to note that the concept of human security is gaining ground, even though the debates on what constitutes human security are by no means over. Thailand believes that human security can only take firm root if the basic needs of peoples are fulfilled and peoples are free from social and economic threats to their well-being. How can we begin to talk about human security, let alone international peace and international security, when 1.2 billion people in the world live on less than 1 US dollar a day, about 90 million children are out of school at the primary level and about 1.2 million women and children under 18 are trafficked for prostitution each year?

We therefore advocate freeing people from want by effectively and collectively meeting the challenges posed by poverty, illiteracy, infectious disease, famine, natural disaster, social unrest and disintegration. These are in fact the very same goals that we need to achieve in promoting people-centred development.

The achievement of human security also requires the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We cannot support human security and effectively pursue people-centred development if we are unable to ensure that people are protected from the worst forms of abuse, suffering and deprivation. We cannot claim to put people at the centre of development efforts if we are unwilling to create political conditions whereby people are able to pursue their lives free from threats to their dignity and personal safety. We cannot expect to develop human potential to the fullest or make people effective contributors to economic development if they cannot have the intellectual freedom to pursue their hopes and dreams for their own future.

Thailand therefore calls upon the international community to renew its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, in order to ensure that people's interests and welfare are indeed at the centre of our policies and programmes. It is with this conviction that Thailand commits itself to playing an active and responsible role within the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Drawing strength and inspiration from one of the most democratic constitutions anywhere, we will continue to give our full support to the efforts of the United Nations aimed at the protection and promotion of basic human rights, freedoms and dignity.

In this connection, Thailand also calls upon the international community to redouble its efforts to assist displaced persons wherever they may be. As host to over 100,000 displaced persons and over a million illegal economic migrants, Thailand attaches great importance to this issue and hopes that it will be resolved comprehensively and as soon as possible.

While we seek to promote international peace and security from within by building support for the adoption of the human security paradigm among nations, we should also redouble our efforts internationally. We should engage in prompt and effective collective action at the regional and multilateral levels to create conditions of peace and stability. At the Millennium Summit, many leaders spoke of the need and urgency of Security Council reform. In line with the increased membership of and mounting challenges to this world Organization, Thailand, for one, supports the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Security Council, based on the principle of equitable geographical representation, efficiency and readiness to share responsibilities.

Furthermore, Thailand fully supports the reform of United Nations peace operations to ensure their effective conduct and thus the credibility of the United Nations itself. As I mentioned during the Millennium Summit, we strongly support the Brahimi report on United Nations peace operations, for we believe that its recommendations are right on target and constitute achievable and practical steps towards the strengthening of United Nations peace operations worldwide. I should also add that peace operations should be prompt and non-selective as well as being comprehensive in nature.

Thailand is therefore honoured to play an important part in United Nations peacekeeping efforts under the United Nations International Force, East Timor (INTERFET) and now under the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), through the contribution of over 1,500 Thai peacekeepers and the role of Lieutenant-General Boonsrang Niumpradit, Force Commander of UNTAET. At the same time, Thailand has always been conscious of the value of regional cooperation in fostering peace and stability and strongly supports regional efforts aimed at confidence-building and promoting preventive diplomacy.

In this connection, we are proud of the seventh meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) recently concluded in Bangkok in July, which saw the admission of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK) into our forum. We warmly welcome the Democratic Republic of Korea's participation in the ARF, the only regional forum that brings together all the key countries in the Asia-Pacific region. We are confident that this will strengthen the momentum for regional peace and security in the Asia and Pacific region.

It is our fervent hope that at this first General Assembly of the twenty-first century, 55 years after the United Nations held its first meeting, we, the Government representatives of Member States, can move forward in fulfilling our promise made in the United Nations Charter to serve the interests of "We the peoples of the United Nations". More than ever before, we need to remind ourselves that it is the peoples of our nations who are at the core of all our efforts, whether these be to pursue social and economic

development, maintain international peace and security or promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. For if we do not fulfil our task in advancing the cause of protecting the welfare of our peoples, who will? If we cannot adequately promote and protect the interests of the peoples of the United Nations, then it is time to consider other ways in which the peoples of the United Nations — indeed, our own peoples — can interact directly with the United Nations.

Now is the time. Let us rededicate ourselves to the task that we set out to accomplish 55 years ago. Let us strive to become what we were always meant to be — a truly representative body of "We the Peoples of the United Nations", acting in defence of their welfare and the advancement of their interests above all else. Let us resolve and pledge to each other that we shall be even more united, better prepared and more resilient to meet the challenges of the new millennium together.

The President: I now call on the Chairperson of the delegation of Turkmenistan, Her Excellency Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me, Sir, to welcome you to your post and to wish you every success in your important and difficult activities in guiding the activities of this Assembly. I should like to say how grateful we are to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab for his wise guidance of the last session of the General Assembly.

The twentieth century was in every aspect a century of sharp contradictions in relations among peoples and nationalities, as well as a century of economic disaster. The most stark examples were two world wars, scores of civil wars and the catastrophe at the Chernobyl nuclear power station, as well as other tragedies.

The flames of war also raged in the African States, which had gained independence in the 1960s. In Central Asia, the Afghan wound is still bleeding, but the most important event of the twentieth century was the collapse of the enormous empire called the USSR — an empire which wore the outer shell of international friendship but within which everything was worm-eaten. New, independent sovereign states arose from its ruins. Out of that rubble, our independent neutral State arose — Turkmenistan, which from the very first days of its coming into being chose the path of goodness and justice, peace and cooperation.

The twentieth century did not resolve many of the problems that needed resolution. Quite the contrary — the knots of these problems have become even more tangled and their lines even more taut. They have accompanied us into the twenty-first century and now we must unravel this tangled web and relax these taut lines. This should be the task and concern of all peoples and nationalities.

Our planet is the house we share and therefore it is the duty of everyone living on this planet to keep it clean and peaceful and to achieve economic stability. In his report submitted to the Millennium Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations drew our attention to problems which require immediate solution, relating to all aspects of our lives.

Globalization is the priority problem. It is an inevitable objective process, part of the general course of world development, which includes many aspects, both positive and negative. This is a decisive trend in world development, which affects the whole complex and multifaceted field of international political and economic relations. In this respect, questions of international law and the moral and juridical aspects of relations between countries and regions cause concern and require constant monitoring.

We must not allow some to hold sway over others or allow mankind to be programmed according to one yardstick alone, and no sovereign state should be dictated to by insistence on one development model. This is a very serious question, because this approach calls into question the entire system of international relations, the legitimacy of international legal norms and the principles and purposes — indeed, the viability of — the United Nations itself as the expression of voluntary cooperation among equal nations.

The model of political globalization based on the supremacy of a neo-liberal philosophy is gradually strengthening the logic of confrontational thought in international affairs, leading to the arm-twisting of those who don't recognize the new international power structure based on humanitarian intervention and protecting human rights, but not on the rights of peoples.

Turkmenistan, like the overwhelming majority of States, is against this approach. We are convinced that the common progress of mankind lies not in dictating one model or in a single set of laws and principles, but a combination of ideas and philosophies. In this

context, I should like to stress the importance and timeliness of the idea put forward by the President of Iran, President Khatami, of a dialogue between civilizations. We started this century and this millennium under such a profound symbol, and this obliges us to have respect and tolerance for a whole range of centuries-old cultures and State systems. That is how we see the possibility for a friendly dialogue among States, peoples and individuals.

We must move away from looking for differences among us and start looking for what brings us together, without forgetting our specific features. That is our approach in our relations to the world and with all our partners, and this has made it possible for my country in the short period of time since our independence to build friendly relations with all our neighbours in the region and to find many friends far beyond the confines of our neighbourhood.

Mr. El-Amine (Comoros) Vice-President, took the Chair.

The main achievement of independent Turkmenistan was to ensure stability within our State, and this stability has been guaranteed because of the universal support of the programmes and tasks facing the State, in which our people take a direct part. It is thanks to this stability that we are today successfully implementing economic and social programmes that seek to provide well-being for our citizens.

The development of a socially oriented policy has been reflected in a strategy for socio-economic reforms in Turkmenistan for the period up to 2010. That programme envisages a continuation of the policy that gives priority to social programmes, bearing in mind the economic realities that have emerged in the years of our independence. Today, Turkmenistan is a country that is self-sufficient in grain and basic food products and that has implemented the main parts of its overall programme for economic security.

In our economic programme, we stress in particular developing the real sector of the economy, institutional transformations and attracting investment — including foreign investment. Agriculture is our priority, as well as the fuel and energy sectors, the chemicals industry and consumer complexes, transport and communications infrastructure and a network of transnational pipelines that export Turkmenistan's fuel to world markets.

One of the main tasks in this coming period will be to develop our productive potential. Here, a leading role will be played by the fuel industry. We intend to concentrate our efforts on labour-intensive sectors; these are promising from the point of view of their potential and competitiveness. The economic growth of our State should guarantee the well-being of our citizens.

From the standpoint of ensuring sustainable social development and the progress and well-being of our people, regional cooperation is becoming particularly important. In our region, we have a stable system for active economic interaction, provided by the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which consists of 10 States with major resource and economic potential. Over the past few years within ECO we have started to implement some important interregional transportation and communications projects which will bring the European and Asian countries' economies closer together, bridge the technological gap between them and establish an equitable system of trade and economic relations between the North and the South.

That same goal is currently being served by Turkmenistan's efforts to export energy raw materials to world markets. Building pipelines is not just a question of profitable commercial projects; these are also projects for the social development of our country on an enormous scale, going well beyond our national confines. Because of this, Turkmenistan is taking an initiative to draft an international legal instrument to guarantee the safe, unimpeded transit of energy raw materials through major inter-State pipelines. This instrument is necessary to make sure that the interests of the producers are taken into account, as well as those of the transit countries and consumers, and that we totally rule out the possibility of the use of these pipelines as an instrument for political and economic pressure.

Another problem that could severely damage regional stability is the question of the legal status of the Caspian Sea. The lack of clarity on this question and the one-sided scenarios being offered impede the use of the enormous potential of this sea. For Turkmenistan, the main point is to take into account the interests of all riparian states in order to ensure that cooperation on the Caspian is based on mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit. Turkmenistan believes that seeking a new legal status for the Caspian Sea requires all riparian States to make some sensible compromises

and show a willingness squarely to face the new realities. This process should be monitored by the United Nations.

Touching on regional security, allow me to dwell on the grave Afghanistan problem, which we take particularly seriously. The history of the long-suffering Afghan people has shown that any outside interference in this domestic conflict, particularly the use of force, is futile and will only make matters worse. We are facing a fair accompli, and in this situation we must recognize that dialogue and cooperation with the Taliban will give more results from the point of view of their natural modernization than any attempts to isolate them or to impose any kind of sanctions on them. Sanctions basically work against the Afghan people. They are therefore counterproductive.

Turkmenistan favours a peaceful solution of its conflicts, and as a neutral, friendly neighbouring State is prepared actively to promote the Afghan settlement under the aegis of the United Nations. In particular, recently, upon the initiative of the President of Turkmenistan, another initiative was taken to work out some mutually acceptable solution to resolve this Afghanistan conflict. That was the point of the Turkmenistan mission which went to Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and held talks and consultations with top leaders of these countries and with the leaders of the Taliban movement and the Northern Alliance, after which proposals to settle the conflict were made at the recent meeting between the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Afghanistan six plus two group. Together with the United Nations, Turkmenistan is making every effort to convince the belligerents to cease fire and to sit down at the negotiating table.

In conclusion, I again assure the Assembly that in Turkmenistan the United Nations has an active Member prepared to make every effort to discharge the lofty tasks decided at the United Nations Millennium Summit. As we enter the new millennium we begin to wonder what it will be like. What awaits us in the future? Every person, every people, living in this world is striving for a better, more radiant future, which has to be built consistently, insistently, on the basis of peace, respect and progress. I hope that all the peoples of the world will devote themselves to that goal.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Domingo Siazon, Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines.

Mr. Siazon (Philippines): The twentieth century was one of great trials and great achievements. The new century will be what we make of it. Whatever has been won in the name of peace, the hunting season in history is not quite over. Tension between nations has not disappeared. Ethnic strife, religious extremism, economic inequity and social injustice continue to fuel conflict. Agents of terror and transnational criminals strike everywhere.

Despite the new wealth of nations, 1.2 billion people live on less than $1 a day. The 32 poorest African countries do not earn much more than the richest man on earth. And, despite the grinding poverty of billions, the world spends $145 per capita on military forces. We must do better — much better — than this.

Our Organization received the needed impetus at last week's Millennium Summit. That should not be squandered. The fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly must reflect the new global covenant for peace and progress. As always, the United Nations must be at the forefront of this great enterprise. We are here to lead.

The Philippine delegation sees this Millennium Assembly as a bridge to link three divides: those of the past and the future; of experience and vision; and of promise and fulfilment.

Fifty-five years ago our Organization arose from the ashes of war. Some founding Member States were very young, just recently set free from centuries of colonial rule. All were still preoccupied with tasks of rebuilding lives and neighbourhoods shattered by the Great War. The ideological divide was to become deeper and wider. The foundations for the walls and curtains that defined an era were just being laid. For the average person then a truly global community was no more than an ideal, remote and all but removed from the day-to-day lives of mostly rural, agricultural populations.

Now we are all part of the global village. Interdependence is a recognized and accepted fact. "Globalization" is on the lips of everyone, sometimes with scorn, at other times with affection, but always with the discernment that it is the wave of the future. Above all else, that future belongs to all the world's people, to both the affluent and the destitute, to both the strong and the weak. With everyone's direct involvement in charting and realizing our common

destiny, we open the door to the fullest flowering of humanity's potential. We also affirm human dignity.

"Wiring" the world's cities into the information grid of the twenty-first century is indeed one wise investment we should be making today. But if anyone were left out, if the "digital device" were but to echo and perpetuate social injustice on a global scale, we would not have moved far from where we started. The past would simply repeat itself.

To empower people is to build our bridge to the future. The world's leaders were therefore on the mark when they enshrined freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility as the fundamental, people-empowering values of the twenty-first century. Now, it is this Assembly's turn to employ those values and take steps to achieve the specific objectives set by the Summit for people empowerment.

Let us buckle down to work and ensure that by 2015 all children will be able to complete primary schooling and, beyond that date, that they have the opportunities to pursue higher levels of education. For let us face it, education is the best tool for protecting human rights, promoting democracy and advancing good governance.

But because a sound mind will work better in a sound body, let us win the battle against disease, including HIV/AIDS, which lays to waste millions in the world's poorest regions. Let us take action to drastically reduce maternal and under-five child mortality from their horrendous current rates and to achieve the lofty goals of the "Cities Without Slums" initiative.

Let us invest in humanity. Let us launch in this Assembly nothing short of a Marshall Plan for the world's people. Let us build this human bridge to our future, now.

The United Nations has both the experience and the vision needed for success. Our Organization has both the privilege and the duty to lead our world into the future with confidence. We know how to do it.

To sustain the United Nations capacity to carry out its tasks, deep institutional reforms must now take place. A more energetic and financially stable world Organization, led by a proactive General Assembly and strengthened by a truly representative and transparent Security Council, must now emerge.

For the new covenant on peace to prosper, the United Nations must remain, without equivocation or doubt, the first and last peacemaker and peacekeeper of the world. It should also be the vanguard that champions the rule of law in international as well as in internal affairs.

Preventive diplomacy must be our principal tool in warding off conflict. We must reduce the use of force. But where we need to use it, as in self-defence or under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, we should be guided by international legal norms and practice.

United Nations peacekeeping operations should be prosecuted with clear and well-defined mandates, adequate resources and strong international support wherever they take place. The report of the Brahimi Panel on United Nations Peace Operations deserves our urgent and careful consideration.

More than ever, the United Nations must now gather together the political will of all nations to bring about the final stage of disarmament and the much-awaited arrival of a nuclear-weapon-free world. Towards this end, we must support the Secretary-General's call to convene a conference on nuclear dangers, actively participate in the 2001 small arms conference, negotiate a comprehensive convention against terrorism and progressively improve weapons and arms budget transparency measures.

The central role of the United Nations does not and should not stop at matters of international peace and security. It should also be at the heart of our efforts to promote prosperity for all. It should lead the charge against poverty and the efforts to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Along with the Bretton Woods institutions and other multilateral organizations and fora, the United Nations is well placed to make important contributions to the reform of global economic and financial systems. For our goal is not only to have a borderless world for unfettered trade and investment. We should found a global economic regime that builds productive capacities, not income gaps; that promotes openness, not corruption; that rewards enterprise, not greed.

In all these, partnerships with the private sector and with civil society are indispensable. Every man, women and child is our co-stakeholder and partner. For

what we are trying to build is a new global order where human security goes beyond mere military security; where law upholds human dignity and both people and State uphold the law; and where political pluralism and cultural diversity are requisite to the attainment of common human objectives.

In other words, peace and prosperity must rest more on human cooperation than on anything else. For in this global village, cooperation is the only tenable way to bridge experience and vision.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration embodies our collective hope: the promise of a true community of nations working together for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. We know that between this promise and its fulfilment lies a tortuous road, yet we must tread its length. In this journey, the first and most important step we should take is to remove the greatest source of danger and discord, that is, underdevelopment. For if one is not free of want, he cannot be free of fear.

In the developing world, the toll from decades of turmoil and abject underdevelopment has been so debilitating that only international relief can help some of us back to our feet. Many of us may cry for safety nets. But not even fish welcome life inside a net. What we need is a new deal for the poor countries.

Development is particularly difficult for countries saddled by mountains of crippling debt. Some 1.6 trillion dollars is now owed by developing countries, several of which have to use up to 95 per cent of their hard currency revenues to service debt. In the meantime, development assistance is declining. This year, grants to developing countries may total 40 billion US dollars — a mere half of what it was a quarter century ago.

As earnest for our collective future, we should have meaningful debt relief for the world's heavily indebted poor countries immediately. Let us also see the fulfilment of the promises of overseas development assistance (ODA) made three decades ago. Further steps must be taken at the third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries next year. We must ensure its success to help our brothers and sisters in Africa, in landlocked developing countries, in nations particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and in least developed countries in all regions of the world. At this Assembly, we should do our utmost to guarantee that all preparations necessary for the success of this conference are made.

We must also redeem the pledge of our leaders to make every effort to ensure the success of the high-level international and intergovernmental event on financing for development in 2001. By investing this event with the active participation, goodwill and expertise of all stakeholders, including the private sector, from the preparatory stages to the plan's implementation, we may yet achieve what several United Nations Development Decades have not.

The world's people took heart from the boldness of spirit and resolve our leaders expressed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. They were reassured that we intend to take the world into the future as partners and not as adversaries. They wished for clear direction from our leaders, and they received it. Now, they look to us in this Millennium Assembly for concrete action. Let us rise to the challenge and build the bridges to peace and prosperity for all the united nations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Lieutenant-General Merafhe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Botswana.

Mr. Merafhe (Botswana): I congratulate the President on behalf of the Botswana delegation on his election to lead the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. He can count on our support as he discharges his onerous responsibilities during this historic session and in the year that lies ahead.

I also take great pleasure in saluting my brother and colleague, the outgoing President, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, for his outstanding leadership of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly — the last session of the twentieth century — and for steering it to a successful conclusion.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has continued to give a good accounting of himself as the chief executive of this, our United Nations. We owe him a debt of gratitude for the manner in which he has, without fear or favour, led the United Nations during the past four years.

Five years ago, in this very Hall, we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. On that historic occasion, the former President

of the Republic of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire, had this to say about the United Nations:

> "The United Nations has served us well. Small States such as my own have found in the United Nations a vital forum for collective bargaining. It has contributed to the advancement of international cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems. It is a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends." (*A/50/PV.37, p. 3*)

Botswana's faith in and commitment to the United Nations remains undiminished, and we are here on the eve of the new millennium to renew that faith and to reaffirm that commitment.

The United Nations begins the new millennium heavily laden with the residual problems of the outgoing century. Even as we meet here, bloody conflicts of varying degrees of intensity and savagery are ravaging societies in many places around the globe. Endemic poverty holds sway in the developing world, in contrast with the lavish opulence of the West. Diseases, the most virulent of which is the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic, have continued to cause untold misery all over the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. All these problems pose a serious challenge to the United Nations and to the international community as a whole. The character of the twenty-first century will no doubt be determined by our ability and commitment to face this challenge.

On the African continent, the struggle for peace and against war remains an all-consuming preoccupation. The agendas of the United Nations Security Council and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) attest to this vexing state of affairs. All the efforts of the leaders of Central and southern Africa, which a little more than a year ago produced the Lusaka Agreement aimed at bringing peace to the war-torn region of Central Africa, have thus far come to naught. There is no peace in the region because the Agreement remains unimplemented even as the parties have continued to profess their fidelity to it.

The United Nations now has the authorization of the Security Council to deploy more than 5,000 observers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to monitor the ceasefire and pave the way for the deployment of a full-fledged peacekeeping force in the near future.

A crucial element of the Lusaka Agreement, among others, is that there must be dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among the people of that country, if the international efforts spearheaded by the United Nations and the OAU aimed at creating conditions for national reconciliation in that country are to bear fruit. Regrettably, there is no dialogue in process in that country, although a facilitator has been in place for nine months.

We hope the Congolese leaders will soon realize that without the implementation in full of the Lusaka Agreement, their country will be bereft of any hope for peace. There may be no second chance. The Lusaka Agreement is their only salvation.

The leaders of Burundi, next door to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, recently gathered in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, to make peace under the facilitation of the former President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Mandela. Their gathering in Arusha attracted the presence of leaders from near and far, including the President of the United States of America, Mr. Bill Clinton.

Regrettably, the peace agreement reached was embraced by some and denigrated by others, which does not augur well for peace in Burundi. It is our fervent hope that those who have not embraced the Arusha peace agreement will do so. In having President Mandela as Facilitator, the people of Burundi could not have been more fortunate — and for the second time.

Before President Mandela, it was the late President Mwalimu Nyerere, may his soul rest in peace, who gave so much of himself for peace in Burundi. Burundi may not be so fortunate a third time. On that occasion, President Clinton had this to say: "So I plead with you: you have to help your children remember their history, but you must not force them to relive their history." Burundi would do well to heed these words and save its children from the scourge of endemic conflict.

The Great Lakes region of Central Africa needs peace. The neighbours of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, all of them, will not have peace so long as carnage continues in their backyard. Angola will not have peace so long as its neighbours to the north are strife-torn.

The United Nations is making steady progress in Sierra Leone, following initial mishaps which

threatened to reduce this Organization to an object of ridicule. The size of the United Nations force in that small country should be enough to frustrate the murderous activities of the bandits of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). In the final analysis, however, the future stability of Sierra Leone cannot be imposed by the United Nations or even, indeed, by the Economic Community of West African States. It is the people of Sierra Leone themselves who must embrace the logic of peace through national dialogue and reconciliation.

The silence of the guns in the Horn of Africa in the tragic war between Eritrea and Ethiopia could not have been more welcome. The region has more than enough problems without endless war. Famine is stalking the area, evoking earlier episodes of human devastation, particularly in Ethiopia and Somalia. In peace, it is hoped the international community will be able to assist the affected areas without hindrance. Our hearts and best wishes go out to the people of Somalia in their difficult endeavour to restore normalcy to their fractured country. We hope the new central authority they have established will be respected by all the parties in the country.

The struggle for peace in Africa, if it is to be successful, must be prosecuted on two fronts — political and economic. On both fronts, I can assure this Assembly that Africa is not a hopeless continent, as some of our detractors would have the world believe.

The Secretary-General's seminal report on the causes of conflict in Africa has not fallen on deaf ears. Our continent has been changing for the better for some time now. Changing democratically elected governments by unconstitutional means, whatever the reason, is no longer tolerated. Coup makers are no longer welcome in the councils of the OAU. We have come to accept that good governance and the rule of law, far from being regarded as sinister neo-colonialist concepts as some may wish to stigmatize them, simply mean accountability and transparency on the part of those who are entrusted with the responsibility of running the affairs of their nations. They mean cultivating a culture of incorruptibility, openness and tolerance.

On the economic front, I cannot gainsay the obvious fact that people cannot eat democracy or good governance. Democracy in an environment characterized by abject poverty and ignorance is an endangered species. Africa needs investment and aid to buttress its democratization process. The challenge facing the United Nations in the new century is therefore to strive to ensure that Africa's difficult renaissance is not simply encouraged but also supported in material ways.

The western world would do well not simply to shout at Africans, to pontificate about human rights and good governance and deprecate the continent's civil wars and endemic instability, from the privileged comfort of Western Europe and North America. Africans need and deserve hands-on solidarity and constructive engagement with the developed world if they are to succeed in their struggle for peace and development.

Let me state the obvious. Small States like my own derive a sense of security from our membership in the United Nations. The United Nations is our shield against the vagaries and predatory nature of world politics. That is why we have been unstinting in the fulfilment of our obligations to the Organization. We pay our dues to the Organization without fail. We have participated in its peacekeeping activities. And we have defended it against its many detractors.

It is no secret, however, that this United Nations to which we all habitually profess our unflinching commitment and devotion is perpetually tottering on the brink of insolvency. This is unfortunately so, even as we equally habitually burden the Organization with escalating tasks for it to perform on a shoestring budget. The Secretary-General is right in challenging us, the Member States, to hold one another responsible for the financial difficulties faced by the United Nations. We alone can resolve these difficulties. We must honour our Charter obligations and do so without conditions.

We must strengthen the United Nations in order to secure our future, the future of mankind. We must continually reform the Organization to adapt it to the realities of the post-cold-war world and the new millennium. A crucial part of this reform and adaptation is the reconfiguration of the Security Council, on which there is sufficient consensus in our United Nations family. The Council needs a heavy dose of democratization and accountability; about this, there is no dissension.

We must strengthen the peacekeeping arm of the United Nations to make good or deliver on our Charter's pledge "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ...". Peacekeeping has always been a crucial function of the United Nations. And so the need to enhance the rapid reaction of the United Nations to conflict situations around the world has long been recognized and is deeply felt. The lessons in Kosovo, East Timor and, more recently, Sierra Leone have taught us that the United Nations needs better trained and well-equipped troops, as well as innovative, imaginative and realistic mandates from the Security Council.

Let there be no repetition of the kind of humiliation the United Nations recently suffered in Sierra Leone at the hands of a ragtag army of bandits. The conflicts that are wreaking havoc on societies today are radically different from those that preoccupied the United Nations during the cold war era. We must therefore devise new and creative mechanisms and strategies for responding to them.

Let me conclude my statement by reiterating Botswana's commitment to the United Nations and its Charter. This Organization is irreplaceable, and I am sure the presence here two weeks ago of so many world leaders to mark the turn of a new millennium is more than enough testimony to this obvious fact.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker is His Excellency Al-Haj Abdus Samad Azad, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Azad (Bangladesh) (*spoke in Bengali*): The historic Millennium Summit and the forward-looking Declaration it adopted have set a very positive tone for the Millennium Assembly, which is now continuing with this general debate.

We extend our heartiest congratulations to Mr. Harri Holkeri on his well-deserved election as the President of the fifty-fifth session. His deep commitment to the values and principles of the United Nations gives us the confidence that the affairs of this Assembly are in very good hands.

I should also like to congratulate Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab, my dear colleague, for his superb leadership of the fifty-fourth General Assembly. We are grateful to him for his invaluable guidance in the preparations for the Millennium Summit and its outcome.

May I also express Bangladesh's sincere thanks and gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his vision in convening the Millennium Summit and for his untiring efforts towards its success. His millennium report contains a number of good proposals and ideas, which we wholeheartedly support. I reiterate Bangladesh's full support and cooperation to the Secretary-General in his determination to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations.

Let me at the very outset extend our heartiest congratulations to the people and Government of Tuvalu as the newest Member of this Organization.

Twenty-six years ago this month, when Bangladesh had just become a Member of this Organization, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, addressed this Assembly. He underscored our commitment to the Charter of the United Nations. For our people, it was a great moment. We have travelled a long way since that time and our commitment to the United Nations has only grown in strength.

As Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina mentioned in her speech at the Millennium Summit:

> "In this Organization, the powerful and the weak, the large and the small, the wealthy and the struggling come together as equals to address their problems, to forge cooperation and to further understanding. It certainly is in our interest to strive for a United Nations which can fulfil our common goal — a better world for every human being".

To the people of Bangladesh, human rights is a sacred trust, because we were victims of its abuse. And yet the very person who had championed the cause of fundamental rights was denied the most basic of all human rights, the right to life. I speak of the ghastly murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with almost his entire family and close relations, by a group of assassins on 15 August 1975. The murderers had committed a crime and human rights abuse of the worst kind. And, in what could best be described as an arrogant affront to human rights and democratic principles, the killers were granted immunity from law by the so-called Indemnity Ordinance issued by the undemocratic regime of that time.

The present democratic Government in Bangladesh has repealed the Indemnity Ordinance since its assumption of office. The accused have been tried and found guilty of murder, and the verdict of the court of law has been announced. Some of them, however, have managed to escape justice by finding asylum in foreign lands. If human rights is to dominate the agenda of the new century, we would urgently ask the international community for its cooperation in bringing these self-confessed killers to Bangladesh to face justice. Here I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to those countries which have been cooperating with us in this matter.

To Bangladesh, a very important manifestation of human rights is the right to development, which needs further assertion by the international community. In ensuring that right, it is essential that our collective efforts focus on addressing poverty. Unless we take positive actions in this regard, globalization will be more of a challenge and less an opportunity — freedom from want will remain elusive. The challenges are particularly daunting for the least developed countries and merit priority attention.

Just as globalization touches us all, marginalization of these vulnerable countries would affect us all in the global family. We would urge the international community to make every effort for the success of the third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in 2001 in Brussels.

In the past decade, the international community has made tremendous progress in recognizing the challenges and adopting elaborate programmes of actions in the areas of social development, human rights, environment, population, human settlement and food security, as well as on women and children. Now the challenge before us is to fulfil the commitments we have made together. Let us resolve that the next decade will be the decade of implementation.

At home, in facing the challenges of the coming decades, poverty eradication has been set as the over-arching goal of the present Government of Bangladesh, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. We are making increasingly great investments in our people and in our social and human development.

In ensuring the effectiveness of this engagement, Bangladesh has focused on the rights of women and children. Bangladesh has become party to most of the international instruments relating to the rights of those two groups. During the Millennium Summit, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the two Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Adoption of the "Woman and Child Repression Prevention Act, 2000" by our national Parliament is also a major step forward in eliminating violence against women and children.

Unfortunately, our efforts towards sustainable human development have been set back through calamities beyond our control. Sometimes it is natural disasters like floods, cyclones or tidal surges. Sometimes it is silent killers like dengue fever or arsenic contamination of groundwater. Today, two thirds of the Bangladesh population is at risk as the result of arsenic contamination of drinking water. The Government has responded to this crisis with urgency and determination; in collaboration with international agencies such as the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Adequate emphasis has also been given to ensuring alternative sources of safe drinking water for the community.

In her statement at the Security Council summit two weeks ago, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina emphasized that international peace and security must also be understood in terms of human security. She also emphasized that we should prevent war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide against the civilian population. We believe that the establishment of the International Criminal Court can effectively deal with these crimes. We signed the Rome Statute last year and have already initiated the process for early ratification.

As an elected member of the United Nations Security Council, Bangladesh remains committed to its obligations to maintain and preserve international peace and security. Bangladesh strongly supports enhanced effectiveness of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as its peace-building measures. Bangladesh is proud to be one of the largest troop contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations, in fulfilment of our commitment to global peace and security. In this context, we welcome the recommendations of the Brahimi Panel and look forward to their consideration by the relevant intergovernmental bodies and the Secretariat. Here we

would emphasize that the resources needed for their implementation should not in any way undermine other, already existing programmes.

An area of our common concern has been United Nations sanctions, their effectiveness and their impact. It is a matter of satisfaction that the Security Council, after years of debate, has set up a Working Group under Bangladesh chairmanship to study various general issues related to sanctions. We are confident that the work of the Group will help the Council to agree on measures to streamline the sanctions regimes.

To ensure peace and development, we must move ahead with an agenda for real disarmament. The nuclearization of our own region in South Asia has caused us concern. As one of the least developed regions in the world, South Asia cannot afford to get into a race for nuclear weapons. In accordance with its constitutional commitment to total and general disarmament, Bangladesh took the lead in South Asia to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996, ratifying it earlier this year. We also were among the first in South Asia to sign the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines, which was also ratified by us during the Millennium Summit, along with the Convention on certain conventional weapons (CCWC) and all its Protocols.

Bangladesh considers peace and development to be fundamental rights. One cannot endure without the other. The United Nations and its Member States must continue to espouse and promote a culture of peace. Bangladesh took the initiative for the international observance of this millennium year and the first decade of the twenty-first century as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, respectively.

As we have said on earlier occasions, Bangladesh believes that the United Nations should be prepared to respond effectively to the challenges of the new century. Since United Nations reforms were initiated by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, a lot has been done, but much more could be added to this. We aspire to greater democratization and transparency in the organizations of the United Nations. We also believe that involvement by non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations.

A changed world needs a changed United Nations — an Organization for today's world. We need to demonstrate courage and determination in order to preserve the United Nations as the world's most universal forum. Its founding fathers spoke about the scourge of war. Today the United Nations will only live up to the global reality if it cannot only free the world's people from the scourge of war but also save succeeding generations from the scourge of poverty.

May Bangladesh live forever.

May the United Nations live forever.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Jaswant Singh, Minister for External Affairs of India.

Mr. Singh (India): India congratulates Mr. Harri Holkeri on his election as President of the first General Assembly of this millennium. We are encouraged that he intends to take the Millennium Declaration as the mandate for the work of the Organization during his presidency.

I take this opportunity to sincerely compliment and to place on record our high appreciation of Foreign Minister Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia for his guidance of the General Assembly in the past year, which included three special sessions and, of course, meticulous preparations for and a successful conclusion to the Millennium Summit.

I join India's voice to those of other delegations in noting with appreciation the dedication with which Secretary-General Kofi Annan has served the United Nations at a critical point.

I am delighted on this occasion to warmly welcome Tuvalu as the newest Member of the United Nations.

Just 10 days ago, almost 150 heads of State and Government assembled here for the Millennium Summit. Their assembly in such large numbers was as unique as was the occasion itself. The Millennium Declaration that was then adopted encapsulates a shared vision that the international community work together in constructive cooperation to meet collective challenges, within the framework of the United Nations. It was in this spirit that my Prime Minister spoke, as did many others, of the need for the United Nations to truly reflect the world of the twenty-first century, to make it an effective instrument to translate

our vision into reality. The United Nations is the house that we all share. We must strengthen it and ensure that it is equal to our collective expectations and our joint aspirations.

Peace, collective security and development inspire the spirit of the United Nations. We enter the twenty-first century with extraordinary collective intellectual and technical capabilities. These are our global tools for overcoming the challenges before us. Peace and security for all is not just possible but is well within our grasp. Stability and development are the essential building blocks for the maintenance of peace and security. Threats to peace can and do arise from different sources. It is not just weapons of mass destruction or an arms race that endanger peace, but also dehumanizing poverty and lack of development.

We must act as confident nation States committed to collective action and international cooperation, for these are our means to provide wider effects of peace and progress. We must reaffirm the principle of respect for State sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of countries. Thus, self-evidently, we must abjure unilateral action. Whenever circumstances warrant action by the Security Council, that action must be firmly rooted in Charter provisions.

The Brahimi Panel's report contains a number of proposals. We recommend that the General Assembly examine this important report carefully and take appropriate decisions to strengthen this vital United Nations function of peacekeeping.

We support the Middle East peace process and find the trend encouraging.

The historic summit between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, too, augurs well for peace in the Korean peninsula.

Disarmament — global nuclear disarmament in particular — is essential to engender a greater sense of security among Member States. India has been and will continue to be in the forefront of efforts towards global nuclear disarmament and genuine non-proliferation. We welcome the recommendation of the Secretary-General in his report to the Millennium Summit to convene an international conference on eliminating nuclear danger. We urge commencement of negotiations on a nuclear-weapons convention to bring about a nuclear-weapon-free world. India remains ready to participate in agreed and irreversible steps, such as de-alerting of nuclear forces, thus lowering nuclear danger, through accidental use or otherwise, as well as a global agreement on no-first-use and on non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.

The situation with regard to the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the lack of progress on a programme of work at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva show the importance of building a consensus, both within and amongst nations, on issues that affect national and international security. We are conscious that 155 countries are at present signatories of the CTBT. We reiterate to them our continuing commitment that India does not wish to stand in the way of entry into force of the CTBT. India volunteered to observe, and continues to observe, a moratorium on further explosive nuclear testing. This meets the basic obligations of the CTBT. India also remains ready to engage in meaningful negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament, including on a global treaty to ban the future production of fissile material for weapons purposes.

The illicit transfer, manufacture and circulation of small arms, particularly by States to non-State actors and to terrorist groups, and their intrinsic linkage with terrorism and narco-trafficking are matters of very deep concern to the world community. When they are combined with religious fanaticism and military adventurism, a threat is posed to the global civilized norms to which we strive to adhere. The international community can no longer afford to permit these purveyors of death, outrage and destruction to continue to inflict untold suffering upon innocents. We look forward to a successful outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, to be held next year.

Terrorism is the global menace of our age. For some, it tends to replace ideology and policy. India has been the object of State-sponsored, cross-border terrorism in its most inhuman manifestations for more than a decade. Even as the international community works together to curb, control and stamp out the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, we need to continually focus our attention on the users of such weapons — the terrorists. Terrorism is an assault on human decency, a violation of the basic precepts of democracy and the very antithesis of what the United Nations represents and stands for. Because its principal

targets are the innocent, it is indeed the most flagrant violation of basic human rights. It constitutes a crime against humanity. It is also a threat to international peace and security, especially when terrorists are armed, financed and backed by Governments or their agencies.

I urge all Members to work to strengthen the international consensus and legal regimes against terrorism. We have proposed the draft of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. I urge all Members of the United Nations to give their total support to this initiative.

Let me now dwell briefly on the instrument of our choice to accomplish our global agenda: the United Nations. There is but one United Nations; none replicate it, nor can any replace it.

The membership of the United Nations has increased manifold in the last half century, and today stands at 189. Yet the Security Council continues to have the same basic structure as in the colonized world of 1945. The need for expansion of the membership of the Security Council in both permanent and non-permanent categories is self-evident. The impact of actions of the Security Council is felt, with near total exclusivity, by the developing countries. Yet they have little influence in its decision-making. We have a global consensus that the form taken by the Security Council in the aftermath of the Second World War is outmoded and that it must reflect the logic of an enlarged membership. At the Millennium Summit more than 150 States, at the highest level, endorsed the need for a Council reformed in its representation. An unrepresentative Security Council will lack the range and depth of sensitivity, perceptiveness and understanding of the realities that it will have to deal with or the moral authority to take decisions. I reaffirm India's willingness to take on the responsibilities of permanent membership.

The General Assembly is the most important organ of the United Nations. It is here that all States, irrespective of considerations of strength, economy or size, sit together as equals, embodying the democratic principle of sovereign equality. There is a growing feeling among Member States that the functioning and role of the General Assembly has to be made more effective. As the revolutions of the digital age reduce distance to the click of a mouse, bringing us together into a new global neighbourhood as never before in history, and as forces of globalization inexorably lead us to increasing interdependence, our canvas of international cooperation and collective action has rapidly expanded. It has also become vastly more complex. The General Assembly has therefore to be central in accepting this new responsibility, this new challenge.

Even as we week to strengthen democratic principles and practices in the United Nations, and even as the spreading sweep of democracy casts aside dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, we have unfortunately witnessed some instances of regression as well. Such acts move against the currents of our times. The international community should oppose these assaults on the spirit of our times and uncompromisingly support and strengthen democratic impulses, practices and norms. It should show its solidarity with the people of such countries. The Organization of African Unity and the Commonwealth deserve our commendation for the steps they have taken in this regard.

Developments in Fiji since 19 May this year have caused us deep concern. We appreciate the action taken by the Commonwealth after the overthrow of the constitutionally elected democratic Government there. We hope that Fiji will return immediately to the constitutional base of 1997 and restore the rule by law at the earliest opportunity by putting an end to racial discrimination. This is in Fiji's own long-term interest. We hope that the international community will exercise its collective authority and influence to bring Fiji back to the road of democracy and the rule of law.

It appears, sadly, that the world has forgotten Afghanistan. The fratricidal conflict in that country continues on account of the Taliban's pursuit of the mirage of military success. It also continues because of outside support, military and financial, to the Taliban. This conflict and the Taliban's mediaeval obscurantist ideologies continue to cause untold suffering to the Afghan people. This adversely affects the peace and security of the entire neighbourhood, from West to Central Asia to South Asia. The negatives that emanate from the Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan, in the shape of terrorism, drug trafficking and the flow of arms, cause justifiable concern all over the world. The Taliban and their mentor must heed the world's demands and abandon the path of conflict. We stand for a comprehensive settlement in Afghanistan that

restores peace at the earliest and ensures the interests and aspirations of all sections of that society.

We have consistently called upon the United Nations to increase its development orientation and engagement, which is a core responsibility. We welcome and support the declaration of the Secretary-General last week to the United Nations Development Programme's ministerial meeting that deficit in development will put in jeopardy all other goals of the United Nations. To address the root causes of poverty meaningfully, we need firm international commitments to re-order and reshape international relations, in consequence providing for equitable opportunities to developing countries for resource earnings. Our call is even more relevant in today's fast integrating world.

Developing countries and their people cannot thrive on a diet of advice and goodwill alone. We therefore hope that the forthcoming conference on financing for development would endorse concrete initiatives for mobilization of the required external resources for development, whether from trade or concessional flows, and treat this as a shared global goal. In this context, it would be useful to establish the difference that would be made if there was universal adherence to the agreed official development assistance(ODA) target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product(GNP), within a specified time frame.

Nowhere is this more important than in the continent of Africa. Africa's efforts need to be adequately supported by the international community. We believe that issues relating to the development of African countries must remain at the forefront of the work of the General Assembly.

The process of globalization, with revolutionary leaps in communications and the great advance in information technology and increased mobility of capital, trade and technology, has produced new potential for sustained economic growth. The benefits of globalization have, however, not percolated to the vast sections who live mired in poverty, without shelter, in hunger and in deprivation. Globalization has often been accompanied by enhanced poverty, unemployment and consequent social disintegration. This poses a major challenge. We have to determine an inclusive concept of growth and development. We have to strive for the uplifting of people in the largest sense, and not simply in terms of sectoral advances. While GDP growth rates and selective indicators may point to growth in an economy, the elimination of poverty and enhancement of the quality of life and creation of real choices must be integral to the process of assessing the success of development efforts.

In India, we have formulated development strategies on the premise that economic and social policies must subserve the primacy of the human being, and in particular the poorest. Market forces and growth alone are not the answer. Intervention to guarantee social justice is crucial. Development based on uneven rewards will not be supported by those who are not its beneficiaries. It places great stress on the social fabric. The fullest possible participation of the people in the development process is the best guarantee for the success of any growth strategy.

Many challenges lie ahead of us. Impediments to sustained economic growth for developing countries abound. Protectionist tendencies in developed countries, a lack of political will to implement commitments undertaken regarding development finance and tardy alleviation of the debt burden of developing countries aggravate the situation. Special and differential treatment for developing countries guaranteed under World Trade Organization (WTO) provisions must be translated into operational reality. Developed countries should not seek to restrict market access to goods and services and free movement of natural persons, especially at a time when developing countries are being asked to open up their economies and compete in the international economic domain.

Another challenge relates to reconciling the needs of economic and industrial growth with the need for preservation and protection of the environment. A safe and healthy environment for our peoples is an imperative. At the same time, all development cannot be sacrificed at the absolutist altar of environmental preservation. Sustainability of growth strategy and environmental conservation cannot and should not imply maintenance of poverty.

Developing countries have done commendable work in the implementation of Agenda 21, in the context of an exceptionally difficult global environment. The promised resources from developed countries have failed to materialize. The transfer of technologies on preferential and concessional terms has not been forthcoming. Indeed, impediments are placed on technology transfer even on commercial terms. The special session of the United Nations General

Assembly on the review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 in 2002 should concentrate on finding solutions in addressing such unfulfilled commitments and providing reality and operational content to the declaration that "eradication of poverty is the over-riding priority of developing countries".

Children and issues relating to them are a priority. We hope that the special session of the General Assembly next year will concentrate on the implementation of the Declaration of the World Summit on Children.

Advancement of the democratic spirit and overcoming challenges to it, growth with equity, economic development with social justice and, as the prize that we seek, the creation of a world where injustice and deprivation give way to fulfilment and welfare for all are among the goals that we should set for ourselves at the dawn of this new century. The challenge is nothing less than collective enlightened global ownership.

The General Assembly once again faces a heavy and challenging agenda on this long road before us. Let us wish ourselves success in our endeavours.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Clément Rohee, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guyana.

Mr. Rohee (Guyana): Still fresh in our minds is the strong plea made by the leaders of the world at their historic meeting on the eve of this fifty-fifth Assembly for a universal recommitment to multilateralism and to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Their Declaration at the Summit's end was unanimous and unambiguous. Humanity's future lies in the hands of this Organization and its ability to create a new global order for the promotion of peace and development. It is a conclusion which the Assembly must take to heart if it is to fulfil this urgent mandate.

I am confident that our task will be facilitated by our President's skilful direction. Coming from Finland, a country that has been forged by history on the anvil of political, economic and social endurance, he will undoubtedly bring to bear on our deliberations a sense of purpose and urgency. In congratulating him on his election, Guyana pledges a readiness to cooperate to make this Assembly abundantly successful.

My delegation also offers its appreciation and thanks to His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab for the able leadership he provided the fifty-fourth General Assembly.

Our gratitude is also due to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who continues to manage the Organization with a sure and steady hand. The report that he submitted to the Assembly, "We the peoples — the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century", amply addresses the many important challenges that lie ahead of us. It is well worth our study to see what measures the Assembly can take to promote global peace and development through strengthening of the Organization.

As the report demonstrates, a high level of tension now exists in the governance of the global economy. While it has been generally acknowledged that markets offer opportunities for growth and development, there is still the caveat against excessive reliance on them. As many developing countries have discovered, the market is often blind to their particular circumstances and needs. Their concerns have raised serious questions about the fairness of the trading system, leading to much public protest, as was dramatically expressed in Seattle and almost every city where the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have tried to hold meetings.

The message is clear: the international community must find a consensus on ways and means to ensure more democratic governance in international affairs so that the developing countries can have a greater say in shaping their own future.

The gap between the richest and poorest countries has widened so dramatically during recent years that strong and urgent action must be taken to avoid a major human disaster. For most developing countries such as my own, a scarcity of financial and human resources places serious constraints on the policy options they are able to exercise. Despite the fact that many have embraced market-based reforms and democratic governance, they have had limited success in improving the socio-economic conditions of their people.

Their efforts to undertake important reforms and to lift themselves up by their boot-straps have been rewarded by a denial of much-needed assistance to sustain the progress achieved. The hostile international environment in which they find themselves not only

frustrates their economic and social development but also renders the strengthening of the democratic process extremely difficult.

Thus, while globalization has benefited strong economies, it has weakened many developing countries and forced them into the backwaters of development. Severe economic and social dislocation has followed in many cases, accentuating the particular vulnerabilities of small economies, many of which are often dependent on a single agriculture crop for the livelihood of their peoples. While the proponents of economic liberalization contend that the market offers "a level playing field", they conveniently forget and fail to realize that the players are not equally matched and that the rules of the game are stacked in favour of the strong. The weak can hardly compete and are eventually marginalized. Indeed, it is a zero-sum game, where both winners and losers are known in advance.

The majority of developing countries continue to be crippled by weak infrastructure such as roads, communications and other physical requirements and the inadequacy of skilled labour to take advantage of opportunities in the market. Moreover, they must face not only high production costs but also low prices and inadequate access to markets. Trade liberalization has also led to a rapid growth in imports by developing countries, while their own exports remain sluggish and their trade deficit widens. In the process, Governments lose much-needed revenues from duties and taxes, which hitherto made an appreciable contribution to the national budget.

Meanwhile, official development assistance has fallen to its lowest since the target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP) was established by the United Nations in 1970. Only four countries — Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden — have reached the mark. On average, developed countries contribute less than a third of this target figure, with the richest countries contributing even less. Assistance is now apparently seen by some as both wasteful and wasted, a perception which may serve to explain this rapid decline. Yet for many of the poor developing countries, such assistance is indispensable if they are to improve their economic performance. To make matters worse, they find it difficult without the requisite technology and human resource base to attract foreign direct investment, which is increasingly concentrated in a small number of emerging economies.

The challenge facing the international community and policy-makers in the new millennium, therefore, is to redress these inequities in the global economy in a comprehensive and sustainable manner so as to ensure the smooth integration of developing countries, in particular the smaller economies, into the globalizing world economy. Developing countries are not asking for charity — merely the opportunity to develop their potential and to take their rightful place in the international community. As they have said, they recognize their primary responsibility for their own development. They ask only for assistance in creating a domestic environment that will enable them to participate fairly in the global economy.

A helpful measure would be to integrate transition periods into current economic models and make provisions for targeted assistance to small economies. Another would be to provide significant debt relief and debt cancellation as necessary, together with development assistance to boost the overall productive capability of developing countries.

Developed countries could also assist in promoting regional integration, as well as South-South cooperation, to allow developing countries to benefit from the many complementarities that they possess. Equally indispensable is the provision of new and additional resources through the establishment of a global development fund that would help to bridge the gap between the developed and developing worlds. An action-oriented programme, somewhat along the lines of the post-Second World War Marshall Plan, is necessary to achieve meaningful progress.

Policies aimed merely at creating unsustainable social safety nets are hardly lasting solutions. The root causes of the social and endemic problems of the developing countries, which ultimately lead to global instability, must be addressed. To this end, we must find a way to direct aid and investment into building capital, both human and physical. We cannot speak seriously of closing the digital divide in an environment in which many Governments are struggling to meet even the most basic needs of their populations and where degraded infrastructure does not support a "communications revolution".

In this context, we have noted the Secretary-General's initiative to forge a global compact between the United Nations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in an effort to maximize

the development effort. Such a strategic alliance can indeed enhance cooperation on a wide array of global issues, including aid, trade and investment, and protection of the environment as well as satisfy urgent education, health and housing needs. To succeed, however, such a compact must be based on mutual understanding and respect through a clear definition of the respective roles of the partners. There must be common objectives and agendas, as well as a clear definition of the roles of each partner.

Finally, the international community, and more particularly the developed North, must recognize the close link between freedom from want and freedom from fear — between development, peace and stability. At the national level, we know that good governance must be practised to ensure that the population are protected from all forms of oppression and allowed to enjoy their inalienable human rights. Correspondingly, at the international level, the principles of the Charter, as well as the laws which we, as civilized nations, have come to accept, must be respected to provide an environment conducive to development.

In chapter IV of his report the Secretary-General remarks:

> "Economic globalization has largely eliminated the benefits of territorial acquisition, while the destructiveness of modern warfare has increased its costs." (*A/54/2000, para. 192*)

This lesson must be learned by States which, despite their professed commitment to the Charter, often resort to various forms of coercion in international relations. The United Nations, and more particularly the Security Council, should not — and, indeed, must not — tolerate such actions. All disputes must be resolved through peaceful means.

While many of the proposals made by the Secretary-General in his report will undoubtedly help to contain the threats to peace and development in the twenty-first century, we rather fear that they will be insufficient to meet our requirements if they are pursued in a piecemeal fashion without a more comprehensive and holistic framework. It is for this reason that Guyana sought the inclusion on this year's agenda of an item on promoting a new global human order. Time does not allow me to provide the details of this initiative. However, so that the concept may be more fully understood and widely supported, I have asked that, along with copies of my statement, an explanatory memorandum outlining the aim of our proposal be circulated. Very shortly we will also make available a more extensive document that could serve as the basis for discussion in plenary session. It is our hope that out of this consideration will emerge a resolution that expresses the determination of the international community to find a consensus on the way forward to securing global peace and development.

The time is now opportune, I believe, for us to summon up our collective political will to devise a common and cogent strategy for managing the global agenda in the twenty-first century. Should we fail to heed this imperative, we will continue to plough the sea and reap only disillusionment and despair. This Millennium Assembly affords us a singular opportunity to define the terms and conditions of a new global partnership. Let us not waste it in futile debate, but, rather, use it to give new hope to our peoples for a better future.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail, Minister of External Relations of the Sudan.

Mr. Ismail (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure at the outset to convey to Mr. Harri Holkeri on behalf of my delegation our congratulations on his election as President for this session. Aware of his well-known diplomatic experience and skill, we are confident that he will lead the work of this session to success. I should also like to express our appreciation and admiration for the role played by his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Foreign Minister of Namibia, during his presidency of the previous session, and for his co-chairmanship of the Millennium Summit.

In this respect, I commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his remarkable efforts in preparing for the Millennium Summit and the Millennium Assembly.

On behalf of my delegation, I also welcome the State of Tuvalu as a new Member of our Organization.

Last week, the Millennium Summit endorsed a historical declaration that laid out a strategy for meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. Today I should like to stress that it is our duty to concentrate, during this Millennium Assembly and through its different forums, on translating that vision into decisions and resolutions to achieve and

consolidate international peace and security, total disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, resolution of environmental problems, combating international terrorism and organized international crime, prevention of conflicts before they erupt and resolution of the problems of poverty and socio-economic backwardness. If we succeed during this session, we can then say that we have contributed to creating circumstances conducive to the achievement of human security and have liberated mankind from fear and want.

On the other hand, we believe that this Millennium Assembly should give equal importance to the reform of the institutions of the United Nations, as they represent the mechanisms through which the international community coordinates the implementation of plans for achieving international peace and security, comprehensive sustainable development and prosperity for mankind.

At the apex of these institutions stands the Security Council. All countries continue to call for its reform by expanding its permanent and non-permanent membership, in order to make it more representative of the current membership of the United Nations. They also call for reform of the Council's working methods and decision-making mechanisms, in order to render it more democratic and transparent.

We share the Secretary-General's view, expressed in his report to the Millennium Summit, that the main challenge we face today is how to transform globalization into a positive power that benefits all the peoples of the world. The great scientific and technological achievements of the last millennium constitute the common heritage of mankind. We call on the international community to work out the necessary guarantees to prevent these achievements from being turned into a monopoly of knowledge or cultural and intellectual domination or from being used as a means to achieve political and economic hegemony or widen the scientific and technological gap between countries of the North and countries of the South. While we welcome protection of these scientific and technological achievements as elements of intellectual property, we call upon our development partners to make this great wealth available to all humanity and to enable the developing countries to use such innovations in overcoming the chronic problems of production, food, health, education and the environment.

The right to development is a basic human right. In order to guarantee that right it is imperative that we establish a democratic, just and transparent world economic order that ensures fair terms of trade between poor and rich countries, increases the level of official development assistance to poor countries and alleviates the debt burden crushing those countries. This is the only viable means to enable the developing countries to benefit from the aspects and opportunities that globalization and the revolution in information technology offer — benefits that are still monopolized by a very small minority of the population of our globe.

In this regard, Sudan looks forward to the United Nations financing for development event and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which are scheduled to take place next year. We sincerely hope that their results will receive the effective implementation they deserve by all United Nations agencies.

This year the General Assembly convened two special sessions to follow up the results of the Beijing World Conference on Women and the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. Despite the remarkable achievements realized by national Governments and the international community in implementation of the commitments contained in the documents resulting from those gatherings, the majority of those commitments were not realized, for several reasons, foremost being the failure to fulfil the financial commitments undertaken in Beijing and Copenhagen and the excessive debt burden and debt service commitments of the developing and least developed countries.

We also call for more support for efforts made by developing countries to eradicate ever-increasing poverty and all pandemic and epidemic diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa.

Sudan looks forward to participating effectively in the World Conference against Racism to be held next year in South Africa. We believe that this important conference will help us tackle crucial issues very dear to the human race. My country also intends to participate in the special session of the General Assembly to review the results and achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children.

Recently, the President of the Republic of Sudan established an advisory body, attached to his office, in

charge of women's and children's affairs. This step is yet further proof of the special importance that the President attaches to the issues of women and children and his incessant work to strengthen achievements in this field.

We view with great interest the report (A/55/305) of the Panel of Experts prepared by Mr. Brahimi on peacekeeping operations, because of its importance and the new ideas and proposals it contains on the containment and prevention of conflicts and on peacekeeping operations. Our delegation will certainly participate in the discussion of this report in the General Assembly and relevant Committees. In this connection, we emphasize the need to set clear mandates for peacekeeping operations, ensuring the consent of the country receiving peacekeeping operations and providing the necessary resources for such operations in order to ensure their success and to avoid any possible dangers and setbacks.

My delegation expresses its deep concern about the difficulties facing the peace process in the Middle East. In this respect, we reiterate the importance of total Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories in accordance with United Nations resolutions, in order to enable the Palestinian people to restore full sovereignty to their territories, to establish their independent State with Holy Jerusalem as its capital and to enable the Syrian Arab Republic to reinstate sovereignty over the Golan Heights. We are convinced that without implementation of these resolutions, stability in this important region will never be realized and will remain a mere dream. In this context, we commend the resistance and heroic struggle of the people of Lebanon in the liberation of their territories.

The call to reform the international sanctions regime is gaining more momentum within the Security Council and other United Nations bodies, because the negative effects of sanctions have compounded the suffering of the peoples of the countries subjected to them, in particular vulnerable groups such as children, women and the elderly. The most horrible and dreadful aspects of the negative impacts of sanctions are seen among the Iraqi people. We add our voice to ongoing efforts to lift these sanctions.

Sudan also reaffirms the importance of maintaining the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq, and rejects any measures taken outside the scope of United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy. At the same time, Sudan reaffirms the need to respect and comply with all United Nations resolutions and to respect the sovereignty of Kuwait, and calls for a just and urgent solution to the issue of Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti prisoners, through cooperation and understanding between the parties concerned. We believe that it is high time to lift all sanctions imposed on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, since it has complied with and fulfilled all its obligations regarding the Lockerbie incident.

We view with satisfaction the recent positive developments in the Horn of Africa, namely, the ceasefire agreement reached between our two sisterly neighbours, Eritrea and Ethiopia. We hope this agreement will culminate in a lasting peace between the two parties, and we should like to commend the efforts deployed by President Bouteflika of Algeria towards that end.

We should also like to hail and commend the efforts of Djibouti and its President Ismail Omar Guelleh to achieve national reconciliation and restore stability to the Republic of Somalia. The Sudan, represented by President Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir, participated in the inauguration ceremony of Abdihassim Salad Hassan as President of the Republic of Somalia. We call on the United Nations and the international community to support efforts to restore peace, stability and security to Somalia under its elected leadership.

While we fully understand the concerns of the international community about the ongoing conflict in the southern Sudan, we should like to recall that the Sudan is waging a war imposed by a rebel movement seeking to undermine its territorial integrity and the safety and security of its people. We should also like to recall that it was the Government of the Sudan that initially invited the United Nations to undertake the task of coordinating international humanitarian assistance for citizens affected by this conflict.

Ten years have elapsed since the implementation of the Agreement known as Operation Lifeline Sudan. However, it has had to be reviewed because of repeated violations of its terms by the rebel movement and some other organizations participating in this process.

In this regard, it is my honour to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and to his Special Envoy, Ambassador Tom

Vraalsen, as well as to the personnel of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the understanding they have shown regarding the Government's demands for ensuring impartiality and transparency, as well as for determining the obligations of all parties to the agreement and ensuring the fair allocation of humanitarian assistance among citizens affected by the conflict on both sides. It is on the basis of this understanding that the Government has committed itself to ensure the safety and protection of all relief agency personnel operating in the southern Sudan.

We believe it is our duty to brief the Assembly on the current humanitarian situation in the Bahr el Ghazal area in the southern Sudan, where the rebel movement has recently increased its violations of the partial ceasefire. This has created obstacles and security complications that impeded the delivery of humanitarian relief to affected citizens in that area. We therefore urge the Assembly to bring pressure to bear on the rebel movement to stop using civilian populations and locations, such as hospitals and schools, as human shields and to fulfil its obligations by halting all military operations in order to ensure unhindered relief operations to all affected populations and to avert a humanitarian tragedy similar to the one endured by Bahr el Ghazal in the first quarter of 1998.

The Government of the Sudan has reaffirmed its commitment to reach a just and lasting political solution to the conflict in the southern Sudan based on the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) initiative and to respond to other initiatives intended to solve other problems. Nonetheless, these peace efforts have not succeeded because of the intransigence of the rebel movement, which continues to renege on its obligations, undermining any agreement reached.

This is clearly reflected in the position of the rebel movement regarding the ceasefire, which it continues to violate, as well as its continued rejection of the call by the Government for a lasting, comprehensive ceasefire — a call that has received wide support from the international community, the IGAD partners and several other United Nations agencies, as well as regional and international groupings.

President Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir reaffirmed in his address to the Millennium Summit the commitment of the Government of the Sudan to a just and lasting political solution based on the following. First, there should be an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the needy and to create a conducive atmosphere and confidence-building measures for the success of the peace efforts. Secondly, there should be direct negotiations on the basis of current peace initiatives, specifically, the IGAD process, which provides a negotiating forum for the Government and the rebel movement, as well as the joint Egyptian/Libyan initiative, which is aimed at achieving a comprehensive resolution to all of the Sudan's problems with the participation of the Government, the rebel movement and the opposition in and outside the Sudan. Thirdly, a comprehensive peaceful settlement should be reached in order to lay the foundation for a fair distribution of power and wealth, establish rights and duties based on citizenship and guarantee total adherence to international standards and instruments of democracy and human rights.

In addition to efforts being deployed to solve the military conflict in the southern Sudan, the Government continues to make efforts towards national reconciliation through direct and indirect contacts with opposition groups. Agreement has been reached to hold a comprehensive national conference in which all political and social denominations and factions will take part in order to discuss national unity, freedom, democracy and the system of government. The conference is expected to agree on a national charter that will provide the basis for a system of government characterized by pluralism, freedoms and peaceful transfer of power.

The Government has taken the initiative of organizing a preparatory meeting for this conference in Khartoum, and a national preparatory committee has been formed. This will be followed by another preparatory meeting to be held in Cairo to determine the agenda, date and venue of the inclusive national conference. It is my pleasure to commend the efforts of the Governments of Egypt and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in this regard.

While efforts for peace and reconciliation are being pursued, the Government is undertaking the necessary legal and administrative measures to establish a democratic, pluralistic system that provides all the necessary freedoms. The Government is also preparing to hold parliamentary and presidential

elections, and has invited and welcomed the participation of international and regional organizations to supervise these elections.

In the economic field, the Government continues to implement programmes of reform and liberalization of the economy and is encouraging local and foreign investment. In this context, it is my pleasure to inform the Assembly that the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund decided at its meeting last August in Washington to resume full cooperation with the Sudan.

The Sudan has also managed to normalize its relations with other international and regional financial institutions, and hopes that the flow of foreign aid and foreign direct investment to the Sudan will enable it to overcome its economic difficulties and relieve its debt burden. We have also started preparations to draw up a development strategy for the coming decade, which will concentrate on poverty alleviation and on providing basic health services, education and rural development. Revenues from the export of petroleum will be earmarked for socio-economic development programmes.

It has now been two years since the United States military aggression on the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in the Sudan, which resulted in the total destruction of an important medical facility that used to produce more than half of the Sudan's needs for basic and life-saving medicines. The debris of that factory and the effects of the missile attack by the United States still bear witness to what happens when the military might of a super-Power is used irresponsibly. It is ironic that the same super-Power that claims to be a pioneer in protecting and safeguarding international peace and security and the principles of international law should resort to such an action. This gathering will recall that immediately after that aggression, the Sudan called on the Security Council to send a fact-finding mission to verify United States allegations concerning the factory and its financing. Yet despite the fact that the whole world, and indeed several media organizations inside the United States, have cast doubts on United States allegations about the Al-Shifa factory, the United States Administration continues to maintain its position, contrary to all facts, thus insisting on justifying a wrong that has deprived the people of the Sudan, especially the vulnerable and children, of a source of medicine at affordable prices — less than half of what those medicines cost on the international market.

Convinced that rights do not die, we shall continue our efforts to urge the international community, the Security Council and the General Assembly to send a mission to verify United States allegations, and we trust that our just cause has the support of all peace-loving countries that guard these noble principles. We wish here to call on the United States Administration not to use its position in the Security Council to block the sending of a fact-finding mission that will show the world the truth and expose the unwarranted aggression against a basic health facility.

The peaceful settlement of disputes is a principal objective and cardinal role of the United Nations. The Sudan adheres to this objective and seeks to realize it in the conduct of its foreign relations at all levels. Based on this position, and in order to realize this noble objective, the Sudan has continuously committed itself to respect for the norms of international law as the only way to settle disputes and to maintain international peace and security.

The Sudan is today one of only 62 States that have fully accepted the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. Furthermore, the Sudan, during the Millennium Summit, signed the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and deposited its instrument of ratification for the 1997 International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings. By ratifying this treaty, the Sudan has become one of a few countries that have completed the process of ratification and adherence to all international conventions to combat international terrorism. This is indeed a source of pride to us. We believe the Assembly will agree that this record qualifies the Sudan to make all possible contributions to maintaining peace and security through the highest specialized institutions.

Since it became a Member of the United Nations following its independence in 1956, the Sudan has continued to work in collaboration with the other Member States in order to develop and sustain international cooperation to realize the objectives of the Charter in all fields. The Sudan looks forward to pursuing this role in another important forum as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 2001-2002, for the first time in 28 years.

The candidature of Sudan has been endorsed and supported by the African continent, represented in the African Group in New York, as well as by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at the OAU summit in Togo last July. The Sudan looks forward with confidence and optimism to obtaining the support and endorsement of all United Nations Members for its candidature in the elections that will take place in the General Assembly in the coming weeks.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rodolphe Adada, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and la Francophonie of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Adada (Congo) (*spoke in French*): May I start by joining previous speakers in offering, on behalf of the Congolese delegation, warm congratulations to Mr. Harri Holkeri on his election to the presidency of this Millennium General Assembly, as well as to the members of his Bureau. He can be sure that the Congolese delegation is ready and willing to help him accomplish his important and delicate task.

I should also like to pay homage to his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia, for the skill and wisdom with which he carried out his mission.

Finally, I should also like to commend Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his devotion and efficiency as he leads our Organization.

The Millennium Summit, that great historic gathering, provided the leaders of the planet with an opportunity to debate at the highest level the burning issues of the dawn of the twenty-first century. The heads of State and Government examined the report of the Secretary-General on the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century, and this led to wise and relevant decisions, which we should welcome. It is now up to us to do our utmost to ensure that the conclusions of that report will be translated into action.

The reform of the United Nations, the management of globalization, the preservation of the environment, the promotion and protection of human rights, peacekeeping and international security are among the challenges facing humanity, today more than ever before. The reform of the United Nations is of course essential. After more than half a century of existence, our Organization must take account of the will of all Member States to participate in the management of the world's affairs. The United Nations must therefore undergo the transformations required in order to adapt to the requirements of the modern world. This reform is in our opinion both necessary and urgent.

With regard to globalization, the question is no longer whether one is in favour of or against this phenomenon. Globalization is a concrete reality that is having an impact on all areas of international relations. Globalization is under way. However, if it is to produce all of its intended benefits, it is necessary to take into account the interests of the developing countries. In this regard, the question of development assistance, debt and access to developed country markets must be envisaged as conditions that will allow more fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation between the North and South.

We are also very much concerned about the environment. Its preservation and protection have been at the centre of the concerns of the United Nations since the world conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It is of the utmost importance for our shared environment to be preserved and managed in conformity with the principles of sustainable development. All of us — developed countries and developing countries, Governments and private sector — all of us must agree to pay the price in a spirit of solidarity in order to remove any pretext for those who sometimes say they have no other choice but to degrade the environment. What is at stake is the indispensable safeguarding of fauna, flora and, above all, the forests of the developing countries.

The Congo, an equatorial country, feels a special responsibility in this area. Our Government has made a solemn commitment to the sustainable management and use of our forests. This subject will in fact be the focal point of a ministerial meeting of the African Timber Organization, which will take place in Brazzaville from 9 to 13 October next.

With regard to peacekeeping and international security, extensive efforts have been deployed by the United Nations to free humanity of the scourge of war. And although our successes may be remarkable, they are far from meeting the expectations of millions of men, women and children around the world, who await with anguish. That is why we strongly support the

proposals in the Brahimi Report and call for their rapid implementation. In addition, we follow with interest and hope the negotiations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and we greatly hope that these efforts will be crowned with success.

We also welcome the most recent developments in the Korean Peninsula, all the more so because these express the will and deep aspiration of the Korean people, separated by war, to live together in peace. We also welcome the results achieved in Somalia, thanks to the mediation of Mr. Ismail Omar Guelleh, President of the Republic of Djibouti. We welcome this true renaissance in Somalia and we express our best wishes for the return of a lasting peace in that fraternal country.

In Central Africa, determined to strengthen their operational peacekeeping capacities in the face of persistent crises and conflicts that are causing deterioration in the region, the members of the Economic Community of Central African States have decided to establish a council for peace and security (COPAX), whose operational organs will include the rapid reaction mechanism and the multinational peacekeeping force. Above and beyond its preventive mission, COPAX is also a response to the Secretary-General's call for reserve forces. It is important for the international community to contribute to the proper functioning of this sub-regional mechanism for preventive purposes and for managing and settling conflicts in this region of the world, which is the victim of murderous, devastating wars. We would like to take this solemn occasion to express our desire to be fully associated in the search for solutions to the problems of concern to us.

Our daily experience — one shared with others — of the consequences of conflicts with neighbours fully justifies this concern; we want to eliminate the sources of conflicts with our neighbours. That is why, whenever it is necessary, the Congo does its utmost to dispel any misunderstandings and to strengthen the links of brotherhood and cooperative relationships with its neighbours.

Here, I must draw the attention of the international community to the humanitarian drama that is under way in the north-eastern part of our country as the result of the massive influx of refugees and displaced persons fleeing the renewed fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country with which we share approximately 2,000 kilometres of border. Given the seriousness of this situation, the Government of the Republic of Congo would like to renew its call for robust assistance for the populations in distress, who have virtually been forgotten by the international community.

As the Assembly knows, my country, the Republic of Congo, has also been shaken by internal conflict. I should like to assure the Assembly that we have re-established peace after the signature of the ceasefire agreements and the agreements to cease hostilities last year, thanks to the mediation of El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Republic of Gabon. Once again, we should like to express our sincere gratitude to him.

Since then, the Congo has turned its face towards the future. The future for us means the consolidation of this peace, national reconciliation, the rebuilding of our country and relaunching the process of democratization. That is why, starting in September of this year, as proscribed by the President of the Republic, Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, the Government of the Congo has undertaken a mission to carry out the broadest possible consultations on a draft constitution to be submitted to our transitional Parliament in March 2001. Its adoption will open the way to a constitutional referendum and general elections.

Similarly, in the framework of the reconstruction of our country, we have just adopted an interim post-conflict programme for the period 2000-2002. Its implementation requires the mobilization of significant financial resources, and the support of the international community is indispensable for this purpose.

We can never reiterate enough that our Organization has demonstrated its utility. Its reform, which is today unavoidable if we are to make it more credible in a world which is undergoing constant change and which will be changed profoundly by globalization, is absolutely necessary. We must have very strong political will to fight against poverty, ignorance, illness, injustice and violence, as well as the degradation and destruction of our planet. This is the only way to guarantee the credibility of the United Nations to the peoples of the United Nations.

May the commitments made at the Millennium Summit guide our daily actions, so that the role of the United Nations will indeed be strengthened over the coming century for the well-being of all of humanity.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Roosevelt Douglas, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

Mr. Roosevelt Douglas, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of Dominica, Mr. Roosevelt Douglas, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Douglas (Commonwealth of Dominica): I wish to extend my congratulations to Mr. Harri Holkeri and his country, Finland, on his election to the high office of President of the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly. His experience and the respect accorded him by the international community will certainly ensure that the matters of this Assembly are conducted with efficiency and urgency.

I should also like to express my delegation's appreciation for the very competent manner in which his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, presided over the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

The recently concluded Millennium Assembly was exceptional for the number of world leaders who attended that historic event. The Declaration adopted at its conclusion sets forth laudable values and principles for the guidance of the international community. Further, it documents the goals that must be achieved and the challenges that must be met if we are to succeed in creating a better world for all citizens of our global village.

But the Declaration is also a strikingly sad chronicle of the deplorable and degrading conditions that affect the lives of most of the world's population: debilitating and abject poverty, economic deprivation, oppression and injustice, inadequate or non-existent health care in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, victimization on the basis of ethnicity, children without educational opportunities but with daily experiences of hunger, lack of fresh and clean water and uncertain prospects of ever escaping depressing and unhealthy surroundings.

These conditions were not newly discovered immediately prior to the Millennium Assembly. Indeed, they have been the subjects of United Nations resolutions at successive sessions of the General Assembly in the past. While there has been some amelioration in some areas, largely through the efforts of the United Nations and its agencies, there has been noticeable deterioration in others. The challenge that faces the United Nations, and the international community in particular, is to go beyond the concerns expressed, the affirmations and resolutions and demonstrate in tangible and effective ways a commitment to serious engagement in a concerted effort to bring about meaningful change in the lives of the many poor people among us.

As the Commonwealth of Dominica and other small States embark on the difficult road of raising the living standards of their citizens, we find the task made much more difficult by the negative impact of the twin forces of liberalization and globalization. Globalization and trade liberalization operate to the advantage of the rich and developed countries, which have the requisite institutional and human resource capability and are well placed to reap the benefits and rewards that accrue from these processes. For small countries like my own, with very limited ability to carry out proper exploitation and to deal with current economic forces, globalization has resulted in greater inequality and marginalization and a widening gap between rich and poor nations.

That is the unavoidable result, since the proverbial levelling of the playing field is in reality non-existent. And the countries benefiting from the process seem to have no interest in making sure that all nations, rich and poor, have an equal opportunity to be engaged in harnessing the opportunities presented by economic and scientific innovations and by the revolution in telecommunications and information technology.

Compounding this problem is the disturbing and alarming tendency of the rich and powerful to fashion international trade rules and organizations with the purported intention of liberalizing trade but which in reality have resulted in creating a decisive edge in international commerce for themselves. Those who advance the concept of free trade as the most efficient vehicle for income enhancement in developing countries continue to cling to protectionist policies for selected items of trade while simultaneously engaged in a determined effort to deny market access that

provides some small measure of special or differential treatment for our exports.

A clear case in point is the World Trade Organization (WTO) and what it represents for the Commonwealth of Dominica and other small banana-producing countries in the Caribbean and elsewhere. We have traditionally, over a period of 50 years, exported our bananas to the European market, under special rules that made allowances for the particular circumstances of small State size, or difficult terrain and high cost of production. In the interpretation and application of its rules, the WTO is not minded to craft decisions that promote equity and fairness among parties of unequal standing. But that is the logical expectation for an organization that was evidently established to decide disputes among equals and on whose dispute panels, particularly at the appellate levels, the advanced countries are predominantly represented.

The ruling of the WTO in the dispute with respect to the European Union's banana import regime has resulted in economic uncertainty in the Windward Islands, a situation made all the more damaging by the continuing inability of the parties to agree on a formula for making the regime compatible with WTO rules. My country holds firmly to the view that adopting either of the current proposals being considered to resolve the banana dispute would result in economic stagnation and dislocation for the banana-exporting countries in the Caribbean, particularly of course in the Eastern Caribbean, as well as Jamaica, Belize and Suriname.

We therefore urge the parties concerned to explore a compromise solution that would allow Dominica and other banana-producing countries to continue to export bananas to the European Union at prices that are fair and reasonable. Equal trade and fair prices are what we ask for, not handouts. Our suffering farmers ask for no more. Meanwhile, our diversification efforts are being accelerated while we stand square and firm in support of our farmers. My delegation calls for a speedy resolution to this impasse, as we view the application by the United States of trade sanctions against some members of the European Union as counterproductive and not conducive to reaching a fair and negotiated settlement. The threatened carousel approach to imposing those sanctions is punitive and a pressure device, unfair to those European countries.

At a time when there is a real prospect of our losing our market in bananas and as we explore avenue of economic diversification, our fledgling financial services sector has been subjected, since June last year, to a potentially serious attack from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD alleged that several Caribbean countries, including my own, are guilty of establishing and maintaining tax havens. These countries were also condemned for having competitive tax regimes and for their unwillingness to undertake to eliminate policies that the OECD unilaterally determined to be harmful to its members. The Commonwealth of Dominica believes that the unilateral formulations contained in the OECD report are inconsistent with international practice and are designed to impede the development of the competitive capacity of the Caribbean jurisdictions in the provision of offshore financial services. We believe that international rules and practices must evolve from genuine consultative practices and must be democratically applied on the basis of accepted principles and norms in the international community. We take the view that the report is simply one more example of small developing States being coerced into complying with rules, standards and practices promulgated by advanced States to advance the protection of their economies while ours continue to deteriorate.

We are committed to the establishment of adequate legislative and regulatory frameworks necessary to insulate the sector from illegal activities. We are also ready to work with the Financial Action Task Force to address any legitimate concerns they may have. However, we do not intend to surrender our sovereign right to act in the best economic interests of our citizens, nor will we be deterred from doing so by threats of any kind from any quarter.

While our efforts at improving our export earnings are being undermined and our financial services sector comes under serious scrutiny, the development programmes and strategies of the Commonwealth of Dominica continue to be affected by the continuing decline in official development assistance (ODA). The expectation that foreign direct investment would bridge the gap has not materialized, notwithstanding the strides we have made in providing a climate of good governance, openness and stable, democratic practice, which, we were told, were the prerequisites for investment development.

The simple truth is that the more advanced developing countries have benefited disproportionately from the tremendous increase in foreign direct investment over the last decade, with the small and less developed States receiving little or nothing at all. There must be an understanding that if small developing States are to embark successfully on the road to sustainable economic development without the benefit of foreign direct investment, official development assistance is indispensable to that process and the declining trend in the provision of official development assistance must perforce and necessarily be reversed.

The most deadly threat to our human resource base and to our population at large is the contagion of HIV/AIDS. This disease takes a heavy toll not only in lives but also in social and economic terms, and the countries most affected are the least able to deal with the consequences. Statistics from the recent world conference on HIV/AIDS indicate that sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of infection in the world, with the Caribbean coming a close second.

This is not an African or Caribbean problem, however. Global in scope and impact, the HIV/AIDS pandemic warrants global attention and action. The Commonwealth of Dominica believes that as a first immediate step there must come into being a partnership between the pharmaceutical manufacturers and the stakeholders in the international community, with the express purpose of ensuring that less costly HIV/AIDS medication is readily available to those most in need. Simultaneously, there must be increased efforts at raising awareness and consciousness of the crisis and the preventive measures available, while a dedicated commitment to the development of an AIDS vaccine must be matched by increasing funding for research.

In 1994, the Commonwealth of Dominica participated in the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and there reaffirmed our commitment to sustainable development programmes that enhance the quality of the lives of peoples, including their health, well-being and safety.

The task ahead of us is to ensure that the measures and the resources of small island developing States — the oceans, coastal environments, biodiversity and human resources — are utilized in a sustainable manner that will be to the advantage of present and future generations, as it is our responsibility to preserve them. My country shares with small island developing States the problem of the safe disposal of solid and liquid waste. It has been recognized that this lack of capacity results in marine pollution and coastal degradation. Our position is consistent with the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development that small island developing States will be constrained in meeting the challenges that face them if they do not have the cooperation and assistance of the international community.

As the United Nations meets for the first General Assembly of the new century, the delegation of the Commonwealth of Dominica wishes to address once again the issue of democratic representation in the United Nations for the people of the Republic of China. It is a concern to my delegation that the Republic of China, with a democratically elected Government and a population of 23 million, is unable to participate in our deliberations.

The Republic of China is a model of democracy in Asia and is more than able to carry out the obligations of our Charter. Over the past few decades, the Republic of China has proved itself to be a good world citizen, using its own economic development to generously assist in alleviating debilitating poverty through economic assistance programmes in many needy developing countries. The situation of the Republic of China should be addressed to ensure participation in the work and activities of our organization and its agencies as a valued member of the international community.

My delegation calls for this fifty-fifth General Assembly to be a new beginning for the United Nations. Rejuvenated by the unprecedented sharing of vision that we witnessed during the Millennium Summit, let us utilize those ideas, proposals, suggestions and criticisms to chart a way forward for the United Nations that will allow it to meet the needs and challenges of this new century.

Let us look towards a new vision for a future that will incorporate the weak and strong, the rich and poor and the developed and developing world, so that none will be marginalized. Let us collaborate in achieving the objectives of the Secretary-General's millennium report of freedom from fear and freedom from want. Let us include all Members — developed, developing and least developed — in the decision-making process